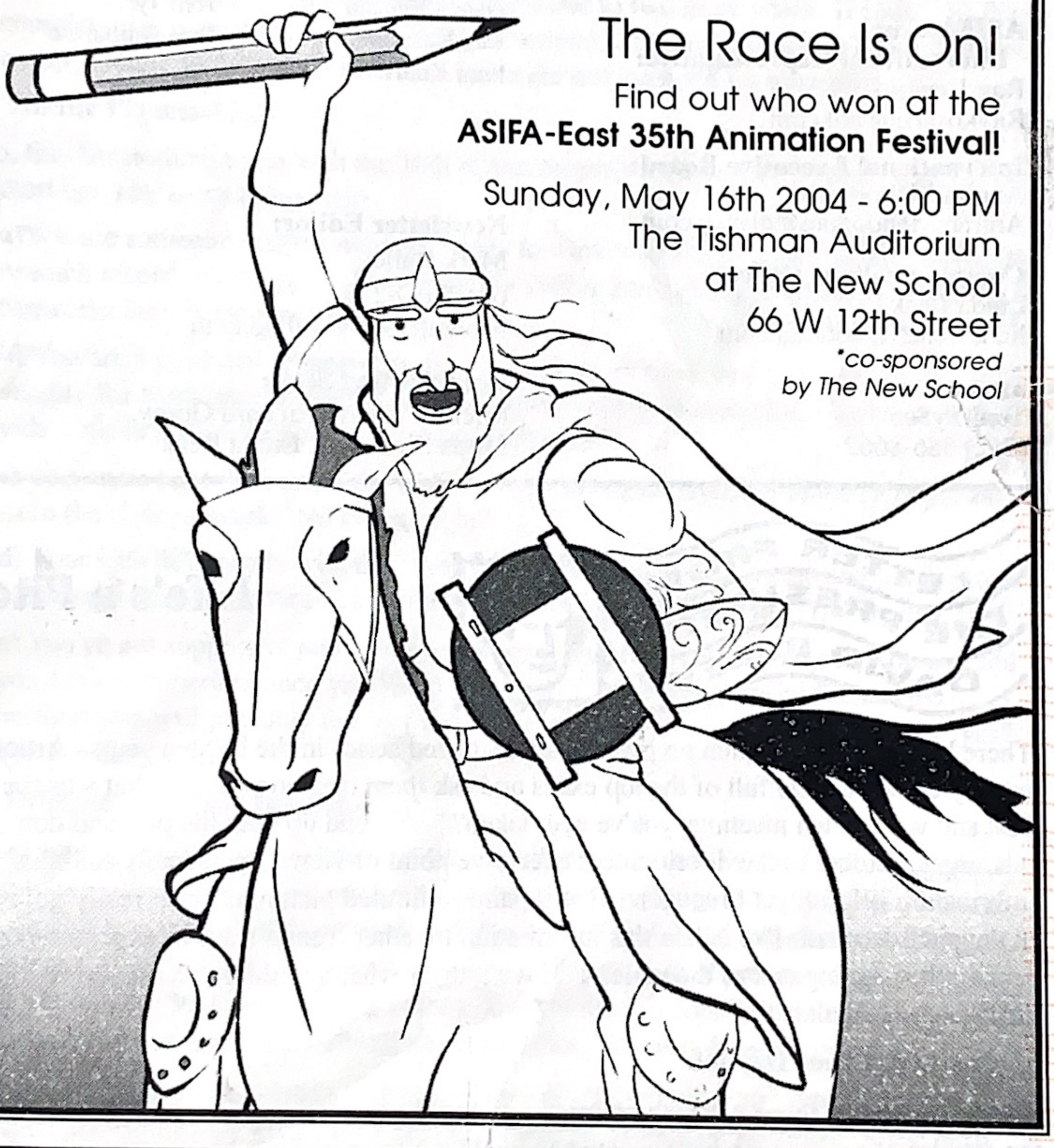
ASIFA EAST • The International Animated Film Society

aNYmator

April 2004



The Race Is On!

Find out who won at the
ASIFA-East 35th Animation Festival!

Sunday, May 16th 2004 - 6:00 PM
The Tishman Auditorium
at The New School
66 W 12th Street
**co-sponsored*
by The New School

Also Inside

- Richard Gorey interviews Linda Simensky
- Michael Sporn on Processes
- Linda Beck on Acting and Animating
- Ray Harryhausen comes to NYC in May

ASIFA East

The International Animated Film Society Northeast /New York Chapter

A Program of the New York Foundation For The Arts

President:
David B. Levy
c/o Blue's Clues
1633 Broadway 4th fl
New York, NY 10019

e-mail: David.Levy@nick.com
Call: (212) 654-6859
Fax: (212) 654-4720

ASIFA-East International Representative:
Ray Kosarin
Raykosarin@aol.com

International Executive Board:
Antran Manoogian
Antran.Manoogian@disney.com

Communications Officer:
Linda Beck
lindaleena8@hotmail.com

Treasurer:
Toni Ty$en
(212) 586-8662

Executive Board

Ila Abramson
Mark Bailey
Linda Beck
Howard Beckerman
Iris Beckerman
Andrea Brietman
Dale Clowdis
Tissa David
Don Duga
Richard Gorey
Anne Bobroff-Hajal
Nancy Keegan
Ray Kosarin
Fran Krause
Will Krause
Candy Kugel
David Levy
Bill Lorenzo
Jose Maldonado
Z. Peter Mitchell
Mike Overbeck
Jennifer Oxley
Anthony Peters
Linda Simensky
Michael Sporn
Toni Tysen
Tom Warburton

Newsletter Editor:
Mark Bailey
631.563.8223
beowulf1969@yahoo.com

Contributing Staff:
Michael Sporn, Richard Gorey,
Linda Simensky, Linda Beck

Life's a Pitch

There has been a lot written on pitching an animated series in the last ten years. Articles usually collect a hand full of the top execs and ask them questions like, "what was the best and worst pitch meetings you've ever taken?" You end up with the do's and dont's of pitching according to the development executive point of view. I personally find this information helpful, yet I recognize that it paints a limited picture of what really goes on in the pitch process. I've culled this information together from a team of experts representing the begging end of the table. I'd love to hear what you think. Write me at dbl1973@earthlink.net

1. Don't Quit Your Day job

The percentage of those working (earning a living) in animation is so much greater then the amount of people who have created and sold a pilot or series. It must be over a thousand to one ratio. The reality is that pitching shows, and in some cases selling shows, is no way to make a living. If you sell your idea, here's what you can probably expect:

a) Prepare to wait up to 3 months for network legal to get you a first draft contract.

b) Prepare to wait for another 3 months to have the contract revised and approved by both sides.

c) Your contract probably only covers a "paper development phase." This means, you only have approval to write a script, create character designs, and maybe a storyboard. This stage can last 6 months or longer.

d) Do or die. Most projects are cut off after the paper development stage. Your chances of going forward are likely fifty to one. Did I mention that this year of work creating, writing, and developing can pay as low as two thousand dollars? Networks don't throw a lot of money at paper development.

e) If your project goes on to pilot stage, this means you will be repeating steps similar to A through D above. This process will take one to two more years. It ends with the completion of your pilot that will likely never make it to air after being killed by focus group testing. In fact, most animated pilots are not intended for broadcast at all.

2. All the Planets Align

No, this has nothing to do with the 10th planet recently discovered by Nasa. This is just a short list why some things sell:

a)You are someone that the network wants to work with. This is due to your reputation or track record of having worked on highly visible commercial projects in a senior role. Networks buy creators not ideas.

b) You are a celebrity. Remember, this is a risk prohibitive business. Its a much safer venture for Networks to green light projects initiated by a celebrity. Celebrities provide built-in audiences and that makes advertisers happy.

c) You came in at the right time, with the right idea and pitched it to the right person from the right network. No sweat, right?

d) Your idea fit in neatly with this week's network development memo and lived up to it's buzzwords like, break-thru-ocity, pixie dust, uber idea, and left-turn. You sly dog, you.

e) You've got supportive and effective network cheerleaders that rally for you and sell you to their superiors once you leave the room. This is very crucial for success because you will probably not be pitching to someone who is authorized to say "yes". Yes is a dirty word.

3. Different But, Not Too Different.

Most networks say they want cutting edge graphics, unique POVs and unconventional storytelling. This is even the case when it comes to preschool material. Oddly enough, the biggest hits for kids (SpongeBob and Power Puff Girls) and tots (Dora and Dragon Tales) are all traditionally animated 2D shows. The truth is, there are very few cutting edge shows on TV. Once again, it comes down to the fact that TV is a business dependent on advertisers revenue. Let's all say it together, "TV is risk prohibitive".

The two examples of networks taking a chance on edgy (risky) programming were Oxygen and Spike. Oxygen's only survivor from its cannon of animation is the fairly conventional "Hey Monie". Spike's first block of animation ended with it's most conventional show, "Stripperella" being the only of its first three animated shows still on air. Spike is about to air its next batch of shows, so one shouldn't rule them out yet.

My point is that it's okay if a show has a familiar element in design, feel or subject matter. This is true so long as there's a twist on the established elements. No one will watch a show that is so edgy it cuts like glass. People (the audience) need to see some humanity in the shows to return week after week... and to (gasp!) want to buy the toy as well.

4. Bunnies Need Not Apply

Networks often say things like "don't give us any ideas with rainbows, trees, clowns or animals." Well what if you had a great idea about a tree-hugging clown that lived in Rainbow Town with his animal side-kick? Some networks won't want to consider your idea starring a bunny because there's already a successful bunny out there (Bugs). One major cartoon making network recently reversed a short-lived no-animal ideas policy. During the days of their animal ban they said, "We believe kids won't relate to shows with animal characters. They want to see other human kids on the screen." When asked how they explained the success of SpongeBob, "We can't", was the reply. So, how can creators navigate through these waters? Happily, these network bans change with trends, marketing reports, shuffling personnel, and hostile company take-overs. Your great clown idea just might sell, yet.

5. Network Identity Crisis

Number's 3 and 4 above, largely happen because today's TV networks see themselves as on-air destinations. Each aims to create a unique programming environment. Ironically, this shows up most clearly in the look, feel and sound of what surrounds the programs (Face on Nick JR, Clay on PlayHouse Disney and the TRL-style live action hosting of cartoons on Nick and CN). Things get a lot grayer when you actually watch the programs. There has been too much cross pollination of network execs and show creators for there to be much distinctions left.

6. Just Watch Our Channel

The single most common piece of advice execs give to potential pitchers, is to "watch our channel" and see what we're doing. This makes for fairly easy research, but what will you really be seeing? You'll be seeing what they bought and developed two or more years ago. Recently, one network broadcast a string of new programming that was made up of mostly space and comic hero type shows. Behind the scenes, the network had already decided to move away from such subject matter in their next development purchases. Sellers beware.

7. Skewed

Networks developing animation for kids try to further distinguish themselves from their competitors by skewing more or less towards girl or boy and between action or comedy. Yet, all this is thrown to the wind as hits emerge on other networks and result in similar projects being green lit elsewhere (think- CN's PowerPuff Girls giving rise to competitor network shows like Nick's Fairly Odd Parents and Disney's Kim Possible).

8. Parting Thoughts

One very successful show-maker told my SVA Career Strategy class that to succeed in this business you need luck, brains, and an incredible work ethic. Come to think of it, I could have saved two pages of type if I'd started with this sentance.

Animating From Behind The Scenes

By Linda Beck

If you were listening to NPR Fresh Air last month you would have heard the writer/director John Waters claim that, regardless of profession, every human wakes up feeling slightly depressed that he or she is not a movie star. Most of us have imagined being Broadway's baby or America's next Silver Screen heartthrob/sweetheart or at least being warmed by one thin ray of limelight.

If you're one of these slightly woeful dreamers, slightly frustrated by feeling eternally stuck "behind the scenes" and unnoticed, lament not. Animation provides some of the best things theatre has to offer, and then some.

In animation related articles and interviews, we've certainly all heard proclamations to attest the importance of having at least general knowledge of basic acting skills. Good actors are storytellers, just like good animators, and in a good acting class, you learn the most efficient and engaging methods of telling a story. Those of us who have budgets too small to hire actors for our own projects make due with mirrors and then project our brilliant private performances onto the screen with pixels, paint, clay, or whatever material we choose. And the great thing is, we can look at them objectively and FIX them if they don't turn out the way we want. While film actors have some control with takes and editing, stage actors have one shot to get it right.

Here's a major difference that may sway you towards appreciating the career you've chosen. Nine times out of ten an animator is ready and willing to bunny up for any hare-brained activity as long as it gets them away from the computer or peg bar. To animators, it's called "free time". To those who have committed their lives to theatre, the term is as dead as Latin. Between temping or waitering and rehearsal, the grand total of physical time in the apartment is about nine hours, probably spent convincing themselves that, though tempting, pyramid sales are NOT the way to financial security.

This isn't to say that life for animators is easier than life for actors. In New York, there are a ton of theatre jobs and about ten times as many actors. Similarly, New York boasts some of the best animators in the business but where the bugeezes are the jobs?! For the animator AND the actor, that rare paying job means immediate preoccupation in finding another one.

Self-marketing is where animators have an edge. As actors are human, they are experts at allowing traumatic outside circumstances to worm their way into their psyches and therefore their auditions. A demo reel is exempt from the effects of a break up, a cold, a conversation with mom gone wrong, or general career frustration and angst. It's a polished and perfected ideal media representation of the maker. It never wavers and usually the animator is exempt from watching the demo reel viewer's reaction and misinterpreting a headache for disdain for the product.

Animators as the producers, directors, cinematographers, AND actors, are forced to think about the art itself and can live free of the pressures of selling themselves. So do not despair! This "behind the scenes", somewhat lonely life allows the work, itself, as a whole, to truly be the star. And ultimately, isn't that what all artists, painters, sculptors, film makers, musicians, etc. strive to achieve?

Linda Beck is a recovering actor turned animator originally hailing from Middleburg, Virginia. She presently lives in Queens with her husband and the cat.

A look back at the Cartoon Network with Linda Simensky

By Richard Gorey

"Age mellows you. In the end, what I needed was perspective," Linda Simensky says, "and a child gave me that. Things that would have seemed important a few years ago seem so silly to me, now."

Even those of us without children might identify with such a sentiment. In the wake of the Trade Center and the War in Iraq, most of us might agree that we're not bothered- or inspired- by the same things we used to be. In a recent newsletter, I spoke about perspective, and mentioned the transitions ASIFA members are experiencing as the industry tries to redefine itself. This month, I spoke to Linda Simensky, whose recent transition (from the Cartoon Network to PBS) has provided her with some useful insight into the industry, what drives it, and what she herself has come to expect from her career.

Some readers know Linda from her ten-year stint as ASIFA East's president; others are more familiar with her from the several projects she has championed at Nickelodeon and the Cartoon Network. To casual acquaintances, she's that nice lady who always has something positive to say about their work when they meet her at the ASIFA screenings. To me, Linda has always represented achievement and success in animation. But what defines success? To many of my fellow ASIFA members, it may manifest as recognition, and money-- and why shouldn't it? Still- how many millionaires are there in cartoons- beside Michael Eisner? Are our expectations rational? When I recently asked David Levy about the reality of a career in the business, he offered this insight:

"I think too many people are coming in with expectations of financial success that may be unreasonable, or unrealistic. It's not an easy way to earn a living. Very few people ever reach that dream of having their own series, and even when they do, the dream isn't what they think it might be. It's hard work."

It's important to remember- while assessing the current market through the perspective of someone like Linda- that the Cartoon Network began not as a production facility, but as a gathering place for existing animation. For some time, it was the place where people could go to see the kind of shows they had seen as children. There was a comfort factor inherent in knowing the programs we grew up with could still be found. In her early days at the Cartoon Network, Linda was responsible for scheduling the kind of shows that had once inspired her:

"When I think of my influences, I came from a world of 'evergreen' shows,' Linda says. "Things like The Flintstones and Bugs Bunny. These were things that play for decades, and go on and on- that become part of the pop culture- and when I got into animation, I gravitated towards such projects, thinking 'That's what animation is to me.'"

At the Cartoon Network, this philosophy was shared by people Linda admired, like Mike Lazzo and Betty Cohen. As time went by, they saw an opportunity, to "come together in support of that idea to develop animation," Linda says, instead of merely re-running existing product. This dedication to expanding the network's parameters was a risk, but in the end, one that paid off handsomely, resulting in several breakout hits: Power Puff Girls, Dexter's Laboratory, and Courage the Cowardly Dog being some notable examples. Linda is rightly proud of her role in championing these cartoons. It would be fair to say shows like these helped re-define modern animation, so pervasive were their influences on animation created in their wake. Their styles and very contemporary sense of humor have become benchmarks for several other shows seen since.

The Cartoon Network has, of course, had some misfires, as well. Expectations were huge for Mo Willems' Sheep in the Big City; two seasons of episodes were contracted, at great expense, but the final series failed to connect with its intended audience. And some fans feel (despite Blossom, Buttercup, Courage, and Dexter) the Network has yet to create its first "mega-star", like Bugs or Mickey Mouse. Recent series like the revamped Duck Dodgers seem to suggest the network is still finding its stride as it enters its second decade; Daffy seems somehow diminished in his current incarnation, and it might take a few tries to recapture that inspired zaniness that came so naturally to the Warner animators, sixty years ago. For now, at least, it's unclear what the ultimate contribution of the Cartoon Network will be. What will be its influence on upcoming generations of viewers and artists? What is the function of such a unique venue, and how will the shows created there play thirty years from now? The network's greatest success has been in creating a "hit brand" that people identify with good animation- but what will the fate of that brand be, as time goes by?

Curious about that mysterious convergence of factors that results in a hit series, I asked Linda to explain what dictated the content of the original shows that were created. How were they developed, and why?

"For a while, it was about pushing the limits of what was 'cutting edge'- making shows that didn't look like Saturday morning animation, since that look and style had become universally disliked," she revealed. "Dexter and Power Puff pushed this limit, and the new look of those shows was so influential that it soon became industry standard."

One doesn't have to search very far to see evidence of this: the bold, flat colors, thick lines, and graphic simplicity other series have adopted since the debut of these Cartoon Network touchstones. Perhaps the greatest example of this breakout style was the florid, stately, and elegant Samurai Jack series, created by Dexter veteran Genndy Tartakovsky. The show's deliberate, very Japanese pacing and emotionally remote main character defined this project as a huge gamble. But viewers took to the series, responding to the stunning simplicity of the backgrounds, the mythic approach to the subject matter, and the offbeat quality of the writing. It remains one of Linda's favorite projects. Like good Feng Shui, the show is sparse, obsessively planned and paced, and has an energy that moves in sometimes-inexplicable ways. Samurai Jack offered a very American take on the existing glut of Japanese animation that (in some viewers' opinions) has become numbingly redundant. Though the Network offers hours of authentic Anime programming, perhaps Samurai Jack is its greatest contribution to this modern art form. Jack is the distant but recognizable cousin of the superlative Batman Animated series created by Bruce Timm. It's as if this type of animation had been created and packaged for grown ups who respond on an almost atavistic level to the legendary struggle between good and evil. Animated "Superheroes" had matured, in provocative ways…and the Cartoon Network was there.

Another series, aimed more squarely at children, was distinctive for different reasons. Ed, Edd, and Eddy, a quirky creation that follows the misadventures of three ostracized preadolescents, is characterized by a jittery, nervous, and constantly-shifting line which uncannily suggests the turmoil and instability of the characters psyches. I admire the ingenuity that dictates the show is not afraid to be as ugly, lumpy, and clumsy as ten-and-twelve year old boys must feel- inside and outside. Ed, Edd, and Eddy is the perfect fusion of style and content- a show that could not (to my way of thinking) be as effective or successful in live action. It wallows in its perception of the body as an awkward, unappealing, and powerful enemy to the delicate self-esteem of young boys and girls. If The Power Puff Girls represent Norman Rockwell's view of a cartoon landscape, then Ed, Edd and Eddy are 'toons as seen through the eyes of Diane Arbus.

Visually, then, the Cartoon Network's series are redefining the way animation is packaged and presented. There has been a real upheaval in what is considered appropriate- and attractive. Many of the series created under Linda's watch have been at the forefront of this significant movement. But, Linda thinks, the real appeal of these shows isn't strictly related to their graphic appointments.

"What I liked about Dexter's Laboratory was the emphasis on being funny," she says. "There were three things in my younger life that were very informative in developing the way I related to my work: Bugs Bunny, The Electric Company, and Saturday Night Live. Nothing has ever come along to top them- and the common link was the humor behind those shows."

Though Linda's career has been mainly in animation, she does not see or define herself as an animator. It's an important distinction to make- since many people have seen Linda as an authority on animation, and may assume (ala Walt Disney) that she does the drawing herself.

To those only now entering the field, it may come as a surprise that the Cartoon Network didn't originally have its own production facility. Linda and her co-workers made this dream a reality, and, as a result, made original programming at the Network not only possible- but quite profitable. Though there had been some awkward false starts along the way, legitimate hits like Power Puff became industry dynamos- generating millions in revenue from licensing and merchandising. Perhaps these monster successes are the reason many young (and not so young) artists aspire to become animation millionaires. Hey…it could happen to you.

For a while, this kind of saturation merchandising was a good thing, but, as Linda relates, down the line it may have become more of the focus than it should have been- and may have hurt the chances of similar projects, in the long run:

"It's not that I have anything against the action shows, but there came a time when they seemed to drive the decisions that were being made. The shows became secondary to the idea of what might be merchandized. This had a huge impact on commercially produced animation."

And, it seems, on the management of the Cartoon Network, who, after the disastrous AOL/Time Warner merger, were scrambling- not for better shows- but for product that would generate merchandising income. "After the merger, there was this attitude of L.A. based snobbery. Arrogance, trickling down from the higher-ups at AOL, who didn't understand animation. Who were business people. There was an emphasis on thinking of the shows as only a component of the bigger picture," Linda feels.

And what was the bigger picture?

"That was the problem," Linda says. "After the merger, I don't think there was one. A 'big picture', a 'mission statement', if you will, beyond making more money. Higher up, the network was run by 5 very dour business guys, who I'll bet didn't even watch cartoons."

Part of the problem may have been that the new management, led by Jim Samples, made business decisions based on a model adopted from the Warner Bros. Consumer Product Division, which dictated products and merchandising sold drove the shows, instead of the other way around. Bob Pittman, from AOL, was one of the key players in the merger. He brought in Jamie Kellner, and together they re-thought how the Cartoon Network would create and distribute new product. In retrospect, their approach was geared towards creating monster hits: mega-shows that would carry the smaller series. In theory, it might have worked. In actuality, this focus on gargantuan profits was disheartening for those who had built the Cartoon Network to what it had become. The first eight years had all shown a profit- last year was the first in the company's history that it suffered a loss. Viewers were straying…but what was happening on the inside?

"Morale was dropping since the merger," Linda recalls. "which as it turns out, was just a terrible disappointment. Those of us who had built this wonderful house were watching as the new owners were allowing it to decay. I was unhappy for a long time before I decided to leave, but of course, had been there for so long that the decision was complex and painful. I still have an appreciation for the network, and I still tune in from time to time to check out what's being done, but my life started to move in another direction, and I felt as if I was no longer the 'good fit' I'd been in the beginning."

The idea of focus groups had always been a step in the development of new shows, but now it entered the process sooner, creating another hurdle for new ideas to grow and thrive. Risks were discouraged; several pilots of varying content and style were reshaped to compliment each other, with the intention being that one might survive the competition at the final pitch round. Getting a series on the air became a contest- and a very brutal one- instead of a process in which an offbeat talent might shine, as had been the case in previous years.

Despite the contention and new restrictions, there were benefits- some very original and appealing projects that kept Linda (and many others) busy- and excited about the possibilities of doing something different. Every once in a while, something would come along and knock one out of the park- with unexpected repercussions. Among these was the playfully crude Flintstones on the Rocks movie, created by the Dexter's Lab team of artists and writers. It was a savage incarnation of the well-known series; a ferociously caustic and visually arresting retelling of the established Flintstones mythology. The kind of thing that only could have been produced at a place like Cartoon Network. Linda feels in this case, however, she and her co-workers may have gone too far; there were complaints from some offended viewers, and the film was run only sporadically thereafter.

"Guys in their thirties and forties love it, but no one else does," she says, laughing. "It had moments of brilliance (a stop-motion interlude which calls to mind the "View-Master" era of the late sixties) but overall I felt it could have been less cruel, and more funny. I found Fred a little too mean throughout it. That bothered me."

Others thought so, too. Wilma, for instance, was terribly mercenary in the special, cantankerous with Fred until she believes he has bought her an expensive necklace. And yet, "On the Rocks" was the kind of thing many of us would like to have seen more of. That this crazy, rude little movie was produced at all is one of the small miracles of that era. Linda recalls such risks became a liability as time went by, since management \seemed geared towards championing already-established themes and shows.

"For a while," Linda says, "the entire field was driven by the need for those huge hits: Rugrats, Power Rangers, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, etc. Those mega-shows were never my cup of tea. At the Cartoon Network, my whole career was based on gender-neutral, funny cartoons- not the Superheroes people sometimes define the network by. When I was a kid, I liked Spiderman, but that wasn't 'superheroes' to me, it was Mythology."

That kind of mythology reentered animation through the sophisticated Batman Animated series created by Bruce Timm, for the Fox network ad later re-run on Cartoon Network. Later, Timm partnered with Linda to create similar shows- but somehow the results didn't have quite the same impact.

"Justice League was perfectly good," Linda says. "And I think Bruce Timm is amazing- but I wanted it to be ASTOUNDING. If we were going to revisit the Justice League, I thought it should have been groundbreaking, and it was…pretty good. Just a lot of fighting, to some people's way of thinking- and in retrospect, it could have been something truly special. I have a hard time processing too much action in a scene; my emphasis has always been on written comedy- that interplay between characters."

That "fighting" on such shows became a source of intermittent concern for the folks at Cartoon Network, and from time to time, Linda found herself at the center of such debate. "Well, you know, there's always this faction of people that are going to say "cartoons are too violent', and whatever, and once I found myself being interviewed on NPR, and defending shows like Justice League. It was a strange experience. Often, in my career, I've been interviewed, and I've said some things that may not have been the popular opinion, but at least they were true for me," Linda says. "This was the first time I felt as if I was towing the company line. I said to myself after the tape recorder clicked off, 'did I just defend cartoon violence on NPR?'"

One could argue that the most violent cartoons seen on the Network were the frighteningly physical "Tom and Jerry" shorts, produced at MGM sixty years ago- but the point seemed to be (at least to Linda and others like her) that the emphasis was on boys action shows, instead of more offbeat comedy programming. In the end, such pursuits left a large segment of the audience- girls- out in the cold.

Of course, this isn't unique to the Cartoon Network; girls traditionally don't respond to cartoons in the same way that boys do. In fact, Charlie Schroder, of Braze Management, an independent producer of animation, says, "Statistics show that girls stop watching animation at age nine. Well, I say; give them something to watch, and they'll come back."

Linda agrees. "I felt, after a while, that the chance to do something different had vanished. I found, after Mike Lazzo had gone on to the popular Adult Swim cartoon block, I should have wanted his job. I liked Adult Swim, but wanted to stay focused on kids comedy."

This Adult Swim block of programming has become one of the Cartoon Network's most ingratiating recent offerings. It consists of many oddball shorts and series, along with satires of reality and talk show standards. It's the kind of thing Linda felt was needed (she's always been a believer in adult animation) but she found herself growing in a different direction, thanks in large part to the influence of her son.

"Having my son changed things for me. I found myself watching the pre-school shows he responded to, and having an interest in them; 'this is good, this isn't…this was made by people who hate children,' and all of a sudden there was this epiphany. I started thinking what I would do differently, or better, and what these shows could be like, and I knew this age group (three to five) was not the audience the Cartoon Network had ever really been intended for."

A visit from animator John Dilworth helped turn the tide. "There are people in your life, friends, who are always honest with you," Linda says. "Who will tell you what you need to hear, instead of what you want to hear. He was seeing my departure while my brain was still trying to convince my gut, and he said, 'You should leave.'"

That decision was made easier by some changes that had already been put into place. Linda had brought Heather Kenyon (formerly of AWN online magazine) in, to develop a short films division. Series like Power Puff Girls made the transition to big-screen theatrical incarnations. While these films didn't perform spectacularly well, they proved such success might be possible on a larger scale in the future. Though Linda had long since realized her future lay elsewhere, she has a genuine fondness for the people she met and worked with while in Atlanta.

"The Cartoon Network is definitely still 'a player'. I'm going to miss the artists I worked with terribly," she says. "While I was leaving, to think of the promises I made to artists, shows, etc., and it was pretty hard not to feel as if I was abandoning them. I think the artists forgave me, though. It's a strange feeling to look at shows you've been nurturing for a while, then having to walk away from them." These last projects include the upcoming Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends and Juniper Lee, with which Linda had been involved in her last months. Linda, along with the rest o
new offerings will perform, and if they'll connect wi
shows like Dexter did.

I asked Linda if it was relatively easy to secure another position, non-profit cultural file in the industry, but she reminded me that changing jobs is, by nt, documentary, task. "It's hard to put your own career into perspective," Linda s film a vibrant part position teaching before I left Atlanta, and I considered it, becau ment to pioneering back to the industry. But I wanted to stay in animation, to produc Wide World of tion lifer," she laughs. "In the end, I thought I belonged here at PB idren; and are driven by the mission. They hardly ever talk about ratings here, where res years, every day I would get a 'report card' that told me whether or not I was doing job to someone else's satisfaction."

The PBS world, where Linda has landed since her departure, is quite different from the corporate arena at Cartoon Network. "It feels like going back to school," she says, of her new job. "It's interesting, and different. I'd always felt, so many times in my life, as if I didn't make a good fit. Here I fit in. They get me. I'm only slightly more eccentric than the people next to me. The PBS philosophy is different that the one at Cartoon Network- or from Nickelodeon, for that matter. Independent stations schedule programs for their target demographic, and, though the shows are doing well in their venues, the focus isn't on how well."

"Motherhood changed me. I was talking to a friend of mine, whom I've known for some years, and I remarked that we're completely different from the people we were a decade ago. I'd been working for so long in animation, and there are so many things I'm proud of, but I wanted a life that was bigger than the work. Animation wasn't just my career, it was my love, but I needed some perspective."

I asked her where she saw herself in five or ten years, and she answered, "Sharing information. Teaching. Lecturing. My mom was a teacher, so it's kind of in my blood. I don't know. I'd like to be a teacher and a student at the same time. As far as my career thus far? There are moments that give me great pleasure when I think about them. I'm grateful to have brought Klasky/Csupo and Nickelodeon together. The early days of Nick-Toons- that development period- that pleases me. I like to tell people we made a lot of crappy pilots- then we got lucky and made three good ones. I'm pretty proud of those things."

"When I was the ASIFA president, from '91 to 2000, I contributed a series of letters, which, in retrospect, chronicled the rise of animation from this rough-and-tumble coming together of like minds to this monster industry, then back from the dot.com bust."

Those years were characterized by sweeping changes, both in technology and intention, throughout animation. Though it may be unfair to ask someone like Linda to assess her career while she is still defining it, Ms. Simensky seems quite content to offer her opinions on what her ultimate contribution to the field might be:

"If I'm remembered, I'd like it to be as a sincere advocate of animation," she says. "I was proud to be a key player when Nickelodeon was coming on to the scene. At the Cartoon Network, I didn't create the shows, but I championed them, and fought for them. That was my contribution. What's motivated me was never money, or the recognition. It was my love for animation. Wherever I wind up, that's going to be the thing that drives me."

NYC Animators Band Together For This Very Special DVD

"Avoid Eye Contact"

Go to *www.squarefootagefilms.com* and get your copy!!!

That "fighti[illegible]" on such shows
Cartoon Network, and from
"Well, you know, there'
too violent', and wha
defending shows like
I've been interviewed
ion, but at least they w
was towing the com
just defend

On

mentary currently in pre-production is looking for an ani-
to collaborate with on animated segments for film.

roducing a documentary film on **Toots Shor, legendary nteur/saloonkeeper of the 1940's - 1960's.**

g for a unique way to animate this oral history and bring Toots as a character while integrating it with the rest of the film. We are open to ideas and are willing to explore different techniques that might be fitting for the material, from cel-based to computer animation.

Animators (cel, computer, After Effects, etc.) with reels/examples of work are encouraged to apply. Please send cover letter and reel (VHS or DVD) to:

Bigger Than Life ANIMATION
428 Broome St, Basement Office
c/o Two Tone Productions
New York, NY 11013

Email: *postmaster@catalyst-films.com*

Looking for a company or creative team to take on the task of animating the award winning musical, "**Perseus Bayou**". Full soundtrack already recorded on cd. Open to ideas.

Additional Information is available at *www.williebellmusic.com.*
Please contact David Maddox at *perseusbayou@aol.com.*

Call for Entries

The 11th Annual Austin Film Festival is announcing its Call For Entries for Screenplay, Prime Time, and Film Competitions.

Film Competition early deadline: June 15. Entry fee: $40.
Categories: Feature, Short, and Student Short.
Late deadline: July 15. Entry Fee: $50.

Documentary Competition early deadline: June 15. Entry fee: $40.
Late deadline: July 15. Entry Fee: $50.

Screenplay Competition deadline: May 7. Entry fee: $40.
Categories: Adult/Family and Comedy.

Prime Time Teleplay Competition deadline: June 1. Entry fee: $30.
Categories: Sitcom and Drama.

For rules, entry forms, and success stories, please visit *www.austinfilmfestival.com* or call us at *1-800-310-FEST(3378).*

Call for Independent Art Animation

The Jacob Burns Film Center in Pleasantville, NY, is a non-profit cultural arts center dedicated to: presenting the best of independent, documentary, and world cinema; promoting visual literacy; and making film a vibrant part of the community. The Film Center continues its commitment to pioneering animation programs with a monthly animation series (The Wide World of Animation); hands-on animation programs for local school children; and Animation Shorts Suite, a program featuring shorts before first-run features each summer (see the NY Times Arts & Leisure Aug. 4, 2001).

For more information:
www.burnsfilmcenter.org/FilmProgramming/Docs/series_animation.html

We are currently seeking art-animation shorts of less than 5 minutes, to consider for Animation Shorts Suite summer 2004. Animation Shorts Suite is directed to an adult audience. We are interested in excellence in all animation styles and subjects. Each animated short selected is shown for a period of one week.

VHS tapes or DVDs may be submitted to:

Anne Bobroff-Hajal
Animation Programming Advisor
Jacob Burns Film Center
39 Washington Ave.
Pleasantville, NY 10570

-or-

Anne Bobroff-Hajal,
5 Hathaway Lane, White Plains, NY 10605

Please include a list of all the formats in which your work can be shown, and a bio.

Deadline for submissions: Apr. 23, 2004.

Tapes cannot be returned.

For questions, phone or e-mail Anne:
(914) 761-8353
abobroffNY@aol.com

The Burns Film Center is approximately a 50-minute train ride from NYC's Grand Central Station, and is located across the street from the Pleasantville train station.

JACOB BURNS | film center

VIEW POINT AIEM

PROCESSES

by Michael Sporn

These are interesting times, hence, I guess you'd probably have to say they're good times. Animation's taking some peculiar turns, and things are changing quickly. I was interviewed recently and asked to describe my working methods in detail, and how I use the computer. So I thought I'd write about that here, assuming that what I'm doing is not unusual and wondering if that's the case.

Of course, my articles are focused wholly on 2D animation since I am a 2D animator. Sorry all you CGI readers (perhaps you can suggest ways of changing my processes for the better.)

In the old days, I would animate between one and two minutes of animation a week. Of course, I don't mean Disney/15 ft. a week animation but commercial TV animation. I would animate in pen and have others, who could easily keep up with me, color in the many styles we chose. Things were productive and efficient. When other animators were involved they worked in pencil or ink and sometimes left inbetweens or didn't. Either way, there was a staff to help out in producing the artwork for animation camera.

Then the computer entered my studio. We don't work with anything too sophisticated. Primarily, art is done using paper and scanner, photoshop and aftereffects, and finally edited in final-cut pro. Other programs have been used, but these are our mainstay. This formula has worked for us, but it keeps changing from film to film, project to project.

I've become too addicted to the computer, so I end up doing my animation half on paper and half on computer. All tracebacks are left to photoshop; objects are copied, duplicated and repositioned . . . often. This means that I'm working half like the cel animators of old and half like cut-out animators. To try to avoid the obvious stiffness even the replicated drawings (cut-outs, if you will) are re-colored in photoshop, so there is some life in the drawing.

Regardless of the computer, I'm still trying to get art to look like it was hand drawn and colored and perhaps too much of my time is spent rendering rather than animating. I don't like to leave a lot of the movement for the aftereffects stage for exactly this reason. I'm not crazy about that digital look.

Now, in working with other animators, I'm finding a lot of give and take. Some animators don't want to touch the computer. Their work is done the traditional way and colored on computer. This is probably a more productive way than the way I, personally, have been working. Unfortunately, I like playing with the traditional art on the computer, and I like controlling everything (yes, if you don't know me, I'm a control-freak) so I have to do most of it myself. Other, younger animators like working on the computer and have worked in methods similar to my own.

Backgrounds, almost without exception, are done, in my studio, by hand not computer. I don't think the life that hand-drawn art offers can be produced on the computer. However, there's a lot of touch-up that can be done on those 2D painted backgrounds.

Working on the computer gives me a lot of opportunity to add effects, work in an unlimited number of levels, have immediate replay of the animation and rework things incessantly. This is a significant problem since I do rework art incessantly. Usually, I have to force myself to quit.

That minute or two of completed animation each week, has gone down to about 45 seconds. But now those 45 seconds are colored and photographed. Still in working on longer film projects, another process has to enter the picture so more work can be completed. The one person studio has to change, and the process has to change. It's a challenge, and it's fun.

Ray Harryhausen
Is coming to the Big Apple

Asifa-East presents an evening with Stop-Motion Animation Legend Ray HarryHausen. Hosted by John Canemaker. Book signing and selling to follow.

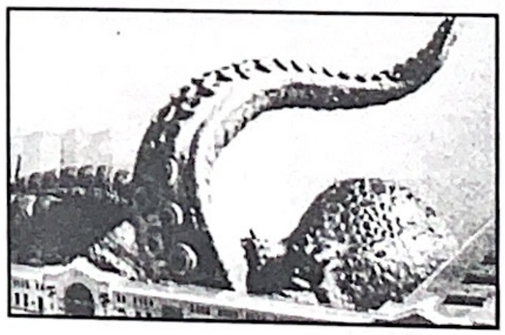
Monday, May 10, 2004. 7:30 PM.
SVA 209 E 23rd Street (btwn 2nd and 3rd Ave)
3rd Floor Amphitheatre

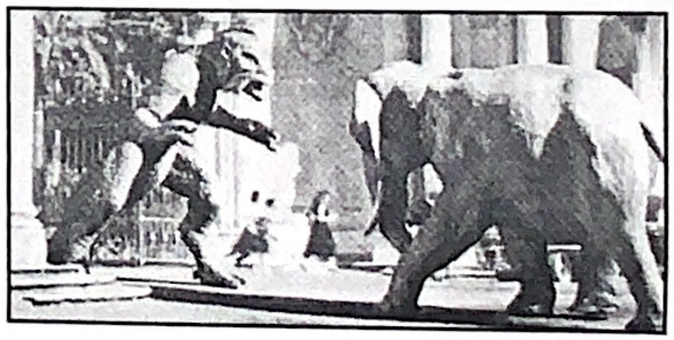
In April, Billboard Books will release **RAY HARRYHAUSEN: An Animated Life** by Ray Harryhausen and Tony Dalton, with a Foreword by Ray Bradbury. First released in the UK, reviewers have been lavish in their praise:

"'Everything he did influenced me...I salute him every day.' When Spielberg, joined by Lucas and Cameron, heaps so much praise on one man you know he's got to be pretty special. Ray Harryhaus is the undisputed master of stop-motion animation, creating effects in such classics as One Million Years B.C. and Jason The Argonauts. This beautiful, lovingly compiled book looks on his illustrious 60-year career." - *Hotdog Magazine, UK*

Ray Harryhausen, an American now residing in London, continues to provide talks and lectures on animation and is available for interview. He has won numerous awards over the years, including a special Oscar in 1992, The Gorden E. Sawyer Award, which acknowledges a lifetime of technical excellence; a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2003; an Annie Award in 2002 for Outstanding Achievement in the Animated Short Subject for The Tortoise and the Hare (50 years in the making!); a Jules Verne Special Achievement Award in 1999; and many, many others.

Tony Dalton is a novelist, playwright, screenwriter, and poet who has written for Broadcast and Variety magazines. Ray Bradbury, who lives in Los Angeles, is the legendary author of fantasy and science fiction works, and a winner of the Nebula, Prometheus, Bram Stoker, World Fantasy, and many other awards.





ASIFA EAST
c/o Michael Sporn Animation, Inc.
35 Bedford Street
NYC, NY 10014

Help Us Tell You "What's Happenin'"

In honor of the late Fred Berry with a nod to Raj' next month's "**aNYmator**" will inaugurate a "What's Happenin'" column dedicated to ongoing dramas and productions within our metropolis.

Whether a kid with an iMac and a dream or a soul chomping megalith, send your news to Richard O'Connor. Make your mother proud. See your name in ASIFA-East's finest publication.

richard@asteriskpix.com
(212) 255-8880